

Stop #4 – Edith Rose Tench (Grave #2915A)

While 2016 is the 150th anniversary of the establishment of this cemetery, it also marks the centennial of World War I. Several veterans of that war are interred here, including the woman whose grave stands a bit taller than the others, located on the corner of this section (*point*).

Edith Rose Tench served as a Yeoman, 3rd Class, in the United States Naval Reserve Force. Born in 1890, she lived with her parents and four siblings on Caroline Street in Fredericksburg, until she married Samuel B. Tench of Petersburg in 1917.

When World War I began, Edith joined the United States Naval Reserve Force, which was created in 1916 to meet a shortage in clerical personnel. The enlistment of women began the following year, just before the United States entered the war. It was the first large-scale employment of women by the Navy. By the time the war ended, more than 11,000 women had served in the USNRF.

Popularly referred to as “Yeomanettes” (a name they detested), the women performed a variety of tasks, including clerical duties, designing camouflage for battleships, and acting as translators, draftsmen, fingerprint experts, and recruiting agents. Although a few went overseas, most Yeomanettes were assigned to duty in the continental United States. Such was the case with Edith, who served at the Norfolk Navy Shipyard. She was probably the only local woman who actively served in the military in World War I.

After World War I, the Navy released the Yeomanettes from active duty. With the exception of nurses, women would not serve as uniformed personnel in the Navy again until 1942. Edith returned to Fredericksburg in 1920 and worked as a clerk in a dry goods store. Over the next nine years she was a member of the Fredericksburg Methodist Church and served as adjutant of the local post of the American Legion. During that period, she studied nursing at Mary Washington Hospital, graduating from the hospital’s school in 1928.

Unfortunately, she did not live long enough to put her new skills to use. On November 29, 1929, Edith Tench died of Bright’s disease, an inflammation of the kidneys.

Besides Tench, there are 19 other women buried in the cemetery, only one other of whom is a veteran. Anna Florence Lockhart, a Canadian immigrant who served as a United States Army Corps nurse in World War I, later became superintendent of Mary Washington Hospital, and was buried here with full military honors in 1935.

The remaining 18 women interred here were married to veterans. Nine of these share a grave with their husband, while the other nine occupy an adjacent plot.



Edith Rose Trench
Yeoman, 3rd Class, USNRF